

# The Doll Baby

By GERTRUDE BROOKE HAMILTON

Illustrations by Wladyslaw T. Benda

**E**LSIE MADDERN was curled in a miserable ball on her bed. Her oval face was fever flushed, her dark eyes were fever bright; one slim hand held her throbbing throat; her shoulder-length hairs spread over the pillow in a gold fluff. In bed with an attack of tonsillitis, nineteen-year-old Elsie Maddernd looked about nine years old. Generations of lives running in a zigzag hit-or-miss had bred Elsie. She was just tinged with slackness. The Maddernd family was modern with a vengeance. Every one of them made money. Stephen, the father, was a motion-picture magnate; Jeffries, the mother, accepted only Manhattan engagements in her high-priced character delineations; Mary Helen, the oldest daughter, sang at the Metropolitan during the opera season; Marian was a successful real estate broker with a hustling office on lower Broadway; Stephanie was getting ten cents a word for her vivid Broadway fiction.

The sumptuously furnished nine-room studio was never very tidy, and as happy-go-lucky in its atmosphere as a house full of romping children. It was seldom that a Maddernd was ill. In selecting a doctor for Elsie, they had taken an "M.D." at random from the telephone book.

Stephanie had a story to finish that day; her typewriter was going at top speed in her room. Mary Helen had a high C to perfect; her piano and voice were trying to meet in her room. Katie, the rosy-cheeked Irish maid, answered young Wilkins' ring.

She pulled back the dragon-embroidered portières of Elsie's bedroom. "Sure, the chickie is not her swate self the day!" exclaimed Katie with sisterly sympathy, beating up a pillow beside Elsie.

"I feel awful!" said Elsie, sitting bolt upright, her bright hair standing out from her will-o'-the-wisp face.

"Here's the doethor, macushla," comforted Katie, taking herself away with a heavy, flat-footed tread.

In her place appeared Doctor Wilkins. Generations of lives running in a smooth groove had bred Young Wilkins. Well-bred, well-to-do, he was an upstanding sort of young fellow in spite of his blue blood: and the celebrated Doctor McDonald had taken him in as assistant in a practice grown too large to handle.

**Y**OUNG Wilkins removed a pink-and-blue kimono and a tasseled bedroom slipper from a chair, and sat down beside Elsie's bed.

"Head ache?" he questioned, taking her wrist in his hand.

"Yes," she scowled. She suddenly flounced in the bed. "I feel awful!" she repeated petulantly.

"Where's your mother?" he asked her, her wrist between his fingers, eyes on his watch.

"Playing a matinée," answered Elsie.

He let go of her wrist and took out his thermometer. "This goes under your tongue," he said. "Close your lips on it."

Elsie opened her mouth. With the glass tube under her tongue, she sat forlornly, knees drawn up under the bed-clothing to her dimpled chin.

Young Wilkins' eyes rested on her gravely. "Is your mother an actress?" he questioned.

She nodded, and pulled out the tube to add: "I am, too."

"Hold on!" he protested, putting the tube back. "Not so fast! Answer me by nods. Are you playing now?"

The tube popped from her mouth. "Am I—" Elsie began eagerly.

"Here!" he ejaculated. "I see I can't ask questions." He pulled one of her yellow curls. It seemed barbarous to him that a frail little twelve-year-old with a feverish sore throat should be left alone in this way. He looked at the thermometer.

"Have I got scarlet fever?" Elsie asked ingenuously.

He laughed. "Not a bit of it. But you must stay in bed for a few days. Do you go to school?"

Elsie giggled. She had caught on to the doctor's mistake. No Maddernd ever let an opportunity for histrionic demonstration pass. Elsie opened her dark eyes with the candor of babyhood, and shook her bright head from side to side.

"Don't you study any lessons?" he inquired compassionately.

"I used to," she lisped. "But I'm playing now. I make two hundred dollars a week!" She bridled with self-pride.

"Poor kid!" he said under his breath. He went to the window and sent the shade to the top.

"Now let's have a look at the throat," he added briskly, coming back to her bed.

Elsie tilted back her head and opened her mouth, showing perfect teeth, a little red tongue, and a pink, inflamed cavern.

"My!" he said. "I bet that hurts!"

"It does!" She swallowed.

"We'll fix it up all right," he soothed.

He took out his pen and wrote a prescription. "Tell your mother to have this filled out; it's a nice tasting gargle," he told her. "You'll be fine as a fiddle tomorrow, but you must stay in bed. How soon will your mother be home?"

He lowered the shade and picked up his hat.

Elsie drew her knees closer to her chin and began to snivel. Her soft under lip curled out, her eyes blinked and filled with big tears.

"I don't know when my mother will be home!" she gulped.

He laid down his hat. "Don't cry," he said sympathetically.

Elsie suddenly put her fists in her eyes and wailed:

"I—haven't got anything to play with! I—I'm—lonesome!"

"Poor little tike!" muttered young Wilkins, with an imprecation for the matinée-playing mother.

He sat down on the bed and put a big-brother arm about Elsie.

"Don't cry, kid!" he begged. "You'll feel all right to-morrow. What do you want to play with—a doll?"

"Uh-huh," sobbed Elsie.

"Well, you wait till to-morrow," he said. "Doctors know how to cure lonesomeness. You wait till to-morrow. By ginger, you shall have a doll! Now, quit crying, kid. Lie quiet and go to sleep."

Elsie obediently laid her head on the pillow and shut her eyes. She looked like a cherub. Young Wilkins stayed for a minute or two, drew the shade all the way down, placed a glass of water within reach of the small hand, and, assured that his little patient was safe in the land of

doll-baby dreams, tiptoed from her room and out of the Maddernd apartment.

Elsie waited until the front door of the apartment had closed. Then she sat up in bed and kicked a pink toe at the dragon-embroidered portières.

Doctor Wilkins went straightway to a big toy shop, bought a doll with real eyelashes and a permanent smile, and sent it to "Little Miss Maddernd" at the West Fifty-seventh Street address. In reply came a note in a childish hand:

Dear Doctor: Thank you for the doll. I have named her Lonesome Lassie, and I love her very much. I used the gargle and it made my throat well. My mother is glad, because I open next week in "Flirtation." I hope you will come to see me act. I have a big part and everybody says I am a smart little girl. I love to act, but I love my dolly best.

Here is a ticket for the first night of "Flirtation." It is for the end seat in the fifth row of the orchestra. My mother said I could send it to you.

Your little friend and patient,  
ELSIE MADDERN.

A baby with a big part in "Flirtation" struck Doctor Wilkins as plaintive.

**O**N Elsie's opening night young Wilkins sat in the end seat of the fifth row in the orchestra.

There were six flirts in "Flirtation." Elsie Maddernd played one of them.

Young Wilkins, brows drawn, studied the program: "Vashti Vanity—Elsie Maddernd." His astounded eyes then pursued the bright-haired feminine figure working masculine havoc on the stage.

Elsie, glimpsing his outraged face among the blurred rows of admiring ones, outdid her Maddernd intuitions on the subject of coquetry.

At the most delightful part of the third act, young Wilkins suddenly arose from the end seat of the fifth row in the orchestra and stalked up the darkened aisle.

Elsie, noting this, fully expected that he would be waiting at her dressing-room door to laugh over the affair. But when the curtain had fallen, and when Elsie had flung a kiss to the stage-box—from which her mother and father, Mary Helen, Marian, Stephanie, and Stephanie's fiancé, Floyd Drake, had zealously led the applause—and run off-stage to her dressing-room, young Wilkins was nowhere in sight.

Arrived home, Elsie slapped the face of Lonesome Lassie and relegated her to ignominious Coventry under the bed. "Old poke!" she flouted.

**T**HE second night of "Flirtation" found the end seat of the fifth row in the orchestra again occupied by young Wilkins. This time he stayed doggedly to the flippant end, in which Elsie took the heart of the house by storm with a unique and fascinating fashion of bestowing a kiss on the man of her choice.

How might young Wilkins, backed by conservative ancestry, know that Elsie and her mother had practised and perfected this method of osculation before an inner circle of family critics? And how might Elsie, with the blood of the Maddernds in her veins, understand the cynical flush that darkened young Wilkins' handsome features? Elsie confidently expected him behind the scenes that evening. And because he did not come, Lonesome Lassie was dragged from under Elsie's bed and viciously spanked!

For seven performances the end seat of the fifth row in the orchestra was occupied by young Wilkins. Elsie played to, at, and around him. She made him laugh in spite of himself and the unhumorous generations backing him. But the footlights stayed between them. So, one night, Elsie very graphically toppled over in a stage faint.

She came to in her dressing-room, in young Wilkins' arms.

"Don't try to talk," he said. "Have

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Generations of lives, running in a zigzag hit-or-miss, had bred Elsie. She was nineteen, the baby of a stage family, and proud of her two hundred dollars a week.